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May 22, 2018

Dear Members of the Committee on Law and Justice,

On May 16, 2018, the Detroit News printed an article stating an agreement reached in a civil lawsuit against Michigan State University was "contingent on Michigan lawmakers dropping the legislative package before the Legislature".¹ The attorneys representing MSU feel by placing a stipulation in their settlement requiring victims of Larry Nassar to pull their support for a section of the statute of limitations bills ending governmental immunity relating to sexual abuse and a section that "waves minors from legal notice requirements" will pressure legislators to remove these provisions. The unprecedented nature of this agreement reached during a civil lawsuit to influence Michigan legislators, is alarming.

As a woman who was assaulted at the U of M, and a mother of two sexual assault victims, I am deeply aware of the challenges faced by victims of sexual abuse and the discrediting, harassment, retaliation, threats, and losses victims and supportive family members can face. I am keenly aware well-heeled and connected individuals can use their positions to cover-up, as well as, the extensive reach they have into Michigan's legal and law enforcement arenas. I am also aware; these individuals have no regard for victims or children harmed. In the past, I have had children chased out of school by individuals in local government misusing the public school system as part of a vicious and unjustified vendetta. My children were misused and their lives upended for decades - and worse occurred.

Current legislation pending in Lansing impacts all victims of sexual abuse in Michigan. Removing provisions from the statute of limitations bills revoking government immunity and waiving minors from legal notice requirements, will be felt beyond Larry Nassar's victims.

Michigan State University's failure to protect sexual assault victims is not solely a reflection of the university, but is a greater reflection of the systemic failure of Michigan to protect *all* victims of sexual abuse. This isn't the first time the Michigan State legislature is lobbied to pass laws protecting child victims of sexual abuse. Past Michigan State legislators held committee meetings and heard testimony from victims. Concerned citizens petitioned Michigan's legislators over past decades to pass statute of limitations bills containing protections for children – the

¹ Kim Kozlowski, "Nassar settlement scraps push for some reforms," Detroit News, May 16, 2018.

appeal fell on deaf ears in Lansing. The failure of Michigan's past legislators to pass laws giving protections to victims, exacerbated and assisted in creating cultures in Michigan's institutions, local government, and other organizations that allowed for leadership failures the public reads in today's newspapers involving MSU. The same culture of silence and cover-up is found in other organizations and institutions in Michigan. Our state carries a deep shame for refusing to protect our children and all sexual abuse victims by allowing governmental immunity to men and women sitting on boards in our state's organizations, hold positions in volunteer organizations, and wield influence in other areas of trust that have a systemic history of using their positions to abuse and cover-up.

If our US Olympians and gymnasts wish to get to the "root" of the problem at Michigan State University, they will need to peer into the backgrounds of past and present presidents and trustees of the university. The gymnasts will find some of these individuals have a history of harassing, covering-up, intimidating, discrediting victims of sexual abuse by misusing their influence and positions.

I am asking Michigan State legislators to keep in place the packages found in the statute of limitations bills revoking government immunity relating to sexual abuse and the section of the bill that "waves minors from legal notice requirements. I am in support of the bills currently before Michigan State legislature giving protect to our states children and victims of sexual abuse.

Sincerely,

Deborah S. Skousen

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